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RENEWTOWN – NEW POST-SOCIALIST CITY: COMPETITIVE AND ATTRACTIVE

Grzegorz Węclawowicz

Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization
Polish Academy of Sciences
Twarda 51/55, 00-818 Warsaw: Poland
e-mail: g.wecla@twarda.pan.pl

The research within the ReNewTown project entitled "New Post-socialist city: Competitive and attractive", funded by the Central Europe Programme and conducted over a period of 3 years (April 2011 – March 2014), aimed to address the following question: "What should be done about the formerly socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe?". The lead partner of this project was the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences, from Warsaw. The international team was also composed of research institutions including: The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Germany), the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia); and different bodies of local governments like: The C.K. Norwid Centre in Krakow (Poland), Municipality of Velenje (Slovenia), Prague's 11th Metropolitan District (Czech Republic), The Regional Development Agency of the Ústí Region (Czech Republic), The Agency for Development of the Gemer Region, Hnúšťa (Slovakia).

The research conducted between 2011 and 2013 was based on social surveys, market research, and 'good practice'. The research was advanced through four investment projects: one in the Nowa Huta district of Krakow in Poland; one in the Jižní Město district of Prague in the Czech Republic; one in the city of Velenje in Slovenia; and one in the city of Hnúšťa in Slovakia. These projects served as possible model solutions for districts with a legacy from the socialist past. In the case of Nowa Huta in Krakow, the problem was a lack of cultural and social events and a shortage of space to cater to such events; in Velenje, it was the poor state and poor quality of public spaces between blocks of flats; in Jižní Město in Prague, it was unemployment with little employment available nearby; and in Hnúšťa, it was a lack of ideas for modern functions of public buildings constructed in the socialist era. All post-socialist cities also struggle with the depressing socialist period architecture. Mainly grey, somewhat dilapidated

VARIA: PROJECT REPORT

buildings dictate the norm. There is little feeling of belonging to a local community. A community rooted in the neighbourhood around one's place of living.

The final results of the research prepared under the framework of the ReNewTown project was the book: *Transnational Development Strategy for the Post-socialist Cities of Central Europe*. Previously published were the *Transnational Manual for Urban Revitalisation: Engage Brighter Future in Your Hands* and the *ReNewTown Handbook of Models: Post-socialist city: A Role Model for Urban Revitalisation in the 21st Century* (Fig. 1). These main documents together with the results of the various social surveys and market research plus databases of good practice and of consultations with the experts, were the basis for several seminars where our results were presented and discussed. Newsletters and several brochures have all helped to provide us with a new substantive starting point for preparing the transnational development strategy. They must be reviewed and then assimilated, and could be utilised to address the purposes of the project, where appropriate. Other key elements were, the close cooperation and exchange of experience among the project team members, particularly between researchers and practitioners from the local and regional government.

The aim of the development strategy has been defined by the requirements of the project. They will contribute to the formation of a new way of thinking about urban governance, management practice, and strategic planning in the urban and intra-urban realms of Central and Eastern Europe. The focus is on changing the social conditions and the living conditions. Special attention has been paid to improvements, and on how good practice in individual cases may be translated into development strategies applicable across the wider international urban domain of the post-socialist European areas.

The proposed strategy takes into account the most important aims and actions.

Setting strategic objectives and goals should be done, if possible, in ways which

will guarantee support for such objectives by market forces. With this in mind, we have identified the following four most important objectives:

1. Formation of a civil society and expansion of human capital;
2. Expanding and improving economic activity;
3. Improving the quality of the landscape and of housing;
4. Ensuring that development is sustainable and energy is used efficiently.

The formation of a civil society and the improvement of human capital can both be seen as vital objectives. The two key elements can be viewed as preconditions, for successful realisation of the other remaining strategic aims.

The objectives selected above, constitute an initial attempt to form a general long-term strategy, in which the division into sectors (e.g. of the economy) is avoided. The long-term strategy is an effort to be comprehensive in social, economic, and political terms. One of the main concepts which needs to be linked to the above strategy, is that 'of the development policy, because the latter needs to be linked directly to the local issues and problems of the post-socialist cities. Hence, this concept of 'territorialisation' was adopted as an alternative to a centralised approach and to the prevailing use of economically defined sectors and modes of governance.

Post-socialist urban space needs various strategic perspectives at appropriate spatial levels, which can probably be articulated best in the form of long-term development plans. Such plans and development strategies should be integrated starting from the lowest levels and preceding to the highest levels i.e. from a local community or neighbourhood to a district level, then to the scales of small or medium sized cities, larger cities, metropolitan areas, and urban systems at the regional and national levels. One of the important conclusions concerns the statement that there is no standard strategy for solving the place-based problems of urban areas. Each

post-socialist district or city needs a coherent strategic framework which will allow its policies to be integrated within the whole city region or within the network of cities forming a metropolitan area. The design should facilitate cooperation between municipalities and functional urban areas (FUA in OECD nomenclature). The final outcome of the strategy should be a shift from 'low aspiration space' to 'high aspiration space'. The practice of transferring problems to another part of the city should be avoided.

The most important challenge involves making urban areas less vulnerable to political, economic, and environmental changes. Among other things, this requires that

people change their whole outlook and their mental awareness. It is necessary to acquire a more modern, forward looking, resourceful and adaptable way of thinking. This process is probably the slowest in relative terms of all the processes involved in the transformation. One of the best examples of a field where such change is needed is in the field of environment issues, particularly where energy conservation is concerned. New forms of governance and particularly a new relationship between civil society and the formal structures of local democracy and government, are clearly essential for post-socialist cities to be able to respond to future urban challenges.



Figure 1. Works published within the framework of the project New Post-socialist city: Competitive and attractive (available for download at: <http://www.renewtown.eu/>)

